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ABSTRACT

The American Nurses' Association endorses the concept of continuing education for all registered nurses as one of the means by which nurses can maintain competence and meet the standards of practice developed by the profession. In nursing, continuing education consists of systematic learning experiences designed to enlarge the knowledge and skills of nurses. Responsibilities of the association, the individual, the faculty, and the employing agencies in continuing education are differentiated. Program guidelines are enumerated, and the status of the continuing education unit (CEU) in nursing programs is reviewed. An explanation of the National Task Force recommendations for the mechanics and record keeping of the CEU is outlined. The Interim Statement and the requirements of administering the CEU as detailed by the National Task Force will provide State nurses' associations and State Boards of Nursing with guidelines in adding dimensions to quality continuing education and promoting the use of the CEU. (AG)

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AMERICAN NURSES' ASSOCIATION

AN INTERIM STATEMENT ON CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

Guidelines prepared by the Organizing Group for the ANA Council on Continuing Education and released for circulation by the ANA Commission on Education

September, 1972

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1896, the American Nurses' Association has been involved in developing standards for nursing education. State nurses' associations and state boards of nursing have assumed the role of promoting the acceptance of implementing these standards.

It is recognized that programs granting college credit and academic degrees are means of improving competence in nursing practice; standards for such programs have long been in existence. The purpose of the enclosed paper is to introduce the concept of non-credit continuing education, together with guidelines for implementing this concept of education.

During the 1972 ANA biennial convention in Detroit, Michigan, a draft of standards for continuing education in nursing was shared with members. Their reactions were expressed in hundreds of written responses and dialogue with members during several convention sessions devoted to discussion of plans for an ANA Council on Continuing Education. Their critiques and comments were closely consulted when the Organizing Group for the Council on Continuing Education in Nursing met in New York June 19-20 and July 19 to revise the "Interim Statement of Standards and Guidelines for Continuing Education in Nursing" for the state nurses' associations and state boards of nursing. The revised document is herewith submitted as an Interim Statement, for your review and consideration.

The ANA Board of Directors has endorsed the establishment of a Council on Continuing Education under the aegis of the Commission on Nursing Education. The Commission has given high priority to the development of uniform standards and guidelines and a uniform system of recordation and recognition of continuing

education in nursing. It is equally urgent that this development be carried out and completed in cooperation with the state nurses' associations and state boards of nursing, working together with existing continuing education committees and institutions of higher learning, to insure effective coordination and implementation of the Guidelines set forth in this Interim Statement on Continuing Education.

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AN INTERIM STATEMENT ON CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

Today, people in the United States consider health care a fundamental right. As standards and expectations rise, it becomes increasingly evident that adequate health services cannot be delivered without the full participation of well-prepared nurses who systematically build upon their basic preparation through life-long learning in the art and science of their profession.

The American Nurses' Association endorses the concept of continuing education for all registered nurses as one of the means by which nurses can maintain competence and meet the standards of practice developed by the profession. With the rapid emergence of new knowledge and technologies and continuing social changes, a concerted effort must be made to assist each nurse to develop and improve their practice and to exercise leadership in effecting changes in health delivery services.

DEFINITION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

Continuing education in nursing consists of systematic learning experiences designed to enlarge the knowledge and skills of nurses. As distinct from education toward an academic degree or preparing as a beginning professional practitioner, continuing professional education activities have more specific content applicable to the individual's immediate goals; are generally of shorter duration; are sponsored by colleges, universities, health agencies and professional organizations; and may be conducted in a variety of setting.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

Association

The American Nurses' Association develops standards for nursing education and devises methods for gaining their acceptance and implementation through appropriate channels.* Another responsibility of the professional association is to assure that opportunities for continuing education for nurses are provided, and where there are unmet needs, stimulate collaboration of educational institutions with agencies and organizations in developing sound educational opportunities. Effective continuing education depends upon a cooperative relationship between the professional association, the provider of continuing education programs, and the learner.

Individual

The primary responsibility for maintaining competence in professional nursing practice must be assumed by the individual. The identification of personal goals and aspirations must precede the definition of individual learning needs. Careful planning of short-term and long-range career goals will then direct the nurse toward the selection and use of appropriate educational resources.

Faculty

The faculty of preparatory programs in nursing has a special responsibility to assist students to undertake a commitment to lifelong learning and to identify educational resources. To fulfill this responsiblity, the faculty should serve as role models of lifelong learning for professional practice. The primary

*ANA Bylaws, Article XII, Section 7.

responsibility of the nurse educator in continuing education is to develop, in collaboration with those who have demonstrated excellence in nursing practice, quality educational programs which build upon the knowledge and experience of nurse learners. Emphasis must be placed on opportunities for acquiring knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and habits of mind which will move the learner toward self-actualization that is essential to the improvement of nursing practice and career satisfaction. Translating educational needs into systematic learning experiences is the major task of this educator. Another significant responsibility of the nurse educator in continuing education is to collaborate with professionals in the health and related fields to develop interdisciplinary continuing education.

Employing Agencies

Health care organizations have a significant role, in close collaboration with educational institutions, of planning and implementing continuing education.

The primary responsibility of the employing agency in continuing education is to afford the employee opportunities to continue the employee's education and development as a member of the health care team. Responsibility and accountability for improving nursing practice through continuing education should be shared by both employer and employee. An appropriate system of recognition and reward should be established.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

1. Programs of continuing education should be relevant to both the educational needs of the learners and the health needs of the consumer. Program planners, learners and consumers of health services should participate in identifying these needs.

2. The continuing education program should be consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the sponsoring organization and each specific continuing education activity should be designed to implement them.

3. The effectiveness of continuing education programs and the determination of learning activities is dependent on continuous monitoring of learning experiences of basic, preparatory and higher degree programs in nursing.

4. An interdisciplinary approach to sponsoring, planning, and implementing continuing educational activities should be encouraged.

5. The specified budget should make adequate provision for planning, conducting, and evaluating of the continuing education program.

6. Continuing education programs for nurses should be developed under the direction of competent nurses who are skilled in designing and implementing the many different kinds of learning experiences.

7. The faculty should be especially knowledgeable about concepts of adult learning and experienced in the application of these concepts. Care should be exercised to assure consistent involvement of individuals, as faculty, who have expertise in the content to be presented.

8. Continuing educational activities may be implemented through a variety of formats and teaching methodologies to achieve the teaching learning objectives, i.e. workshops, institutes, conferences, systematic independent study.

9. Objectives should be defined for each continuing education program and used as a basis for determining content, learning experiences, and evaluation.

10. Continuing education programs should assist registered nurse learners to:

    -acquire new knowledge and skills

-update basic knowledge
-prepare for re-entry into practice
-make a transition from one area of practice to another
-acquire greater depth of knowledge and skills in one particular area of nursing
-change attitudes and values
-implement concepts of change both within the individual's own practice and throughout the health care delivery system
-assume responsibility for personal and professional development
-improve the ability of other health care workers to meet the specific needs of the public served by the health agency
-promote and support innovation and creativity in health services.

11. Provision for continuous evaluation should be an integral element of the overall continuing education program and of each specific activity within the program. Sponsoring agencies, learners and consumers of health services should collaborate in evaluating the effectiveness of the continuing education program.

12. The time allotted to any continuing education activity should be sufficient to insure coverage of the content, development of defined skills, opportunity for reflection, and other identified goals.

13. The sponsoring agency should provide facilities and resources appropriate to the content of the program, such as audiovisual aids, libraries, learning laboratories, conference rooms and secretarial services.

14. Counseling and guidance should be made available so that learners will be informed of the range of continuing education opportunities that may meet their immediate and long-range career goals.

15. Continuing education records should be maintained in a systematic manner. (Reference: The Organizing Group statement on use of the c e u in nursing education.)

THE CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT

The use of the c e u is still in the experimental stage. The National University Extension Association in a Special Report on "Emerging Patterns of Higher Education," December 31, 1971, predicted that "it is highly likely that the Continuing Education Unit will be adopted nationally within a year or two and that a central national data bank will be established to record non-credit continuing education experiences." Conscious of the need for a means to quantify and record the involvement of nurses in continuing education, the A. N. A. Commission on Nursing Education endorsed the use of the c e u in December, 1971. [1] The commission views the c e u as a means of recognizing individual nurses participation in non-credit continuing education activities in nursing.

For the past four years, a group of associations interested in the feasibility of a uniform unit of measurement for non-credit adult and continuing education has been jointly engaged in a process of development, field testing, and refining of such a unit. The associations providing the major thrust have been the National University Extension Association, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, the U.S. Civil Service Commission, and the U.S. Office of Education. Since the National Task Force began its work four years ago, the c e u has become increasingly the focus of attention and recognition from agencies concerned with the problem of recording non-credit education. For example, the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges has revised its Standard IX: Special Activities accreditation policy to include the use of the Continuing Education Unit as a measurement of non-credit activity. All member universities and colleges in the eleven state region are under administrative mandate to use the c e u.

1. The National Task Force has granted full permission for direct use of its material in this report.

DEFINITION OF THE CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT:

The Continuing Education Unit (c e u) is defined as follows: Ten contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education experience under responsible sponsorship, capable direction and qualified instruction.

WHY A STANDARD UNIT OF MEASUREMENT FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION?

All practicing professionals have long recognized the need for continuous updating and renewal of knowledge and skills to maintain and improve competence. The problem has become more acute, and the timetable for renewal more imperative, with the geometric progression in growth of knowledge and the increasingly rapid depreciation in the utility of learning which individuals acquire during the years of formal education. As a result, growing numbers of institutions, and organizations are offering short-term, non-credit continuing education programs.

For too long, participants in continuing education activities have received little or no recognition for their initiative. We still have no universally accepted means of measuring non-credit activity. To date, in fact, we have only raw data--numbers of activities and numbers of persons participating in such activities. These are obviously unreliable clues to the quality and quantity of continuing education that is taking place.

A uniform nationally accepted Continuing Education Unit will reduce the confusion and fragmentation in arriving at a suitable means of recognizing and rewarding individual educational effort.

The c e u holds promise for the sponsoring institutions or organizations as a means of tying loose ends together through a uniform system of recordation. The

individual nurse can accumulate, update, and have available transcripts of continuing education records throughout life. Such records can be referred to in establishing educational and career goals for personal and professional development.

The absence of a universally recognized Continuing Education Unit has tended to weaken the concept of education as a life-long process and the establishment of long-term goals. Learning needs can be assessed together by the sponsors and users with greater validity as to applicability and relevancy to educational goals of individual learners. The lack of documented evidence has also made it difficult to secure an adequate funding base for continuing education consistent with commitment and needs.

USE OF THE C E U AS OUTLINED BY THE NATIONAL TASK FORCE:

Units of measurement and standards (credits) already exist for formal academic education which is oriented toward a diploma, certificate, or degree. It is non-credit continuing education with which the c e u is concerned. It is not "credit for non-credit" nor "credit vs. non-credit." The unit, in the sense of the definition, is reliable if used properly. Organized learning experience, responsible sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction are explicit in the definition of the Continuing Education Unit.

C e u's can be computed for a variety of formats and durations of continuing education programming wherever contact hours or their equivalents can be determined. Included in this system are classes, lectures, workshops, symposia, institutes, short courses, organized independent study, etc. The administration of the c e u should not have to be challenged by users since the sponsoring agents are restrained

to apply the c e u according to specific standards and a uniform mechanism of recordation as stated by the National Task Force.

Types of programs ordinarily not awarded continuing education units:

1. Any program carrying academic credit, either secondary or collegiate
2. Programs leading to high school equivalency certificates or diplomas
3. Organizational orientation training programs
4. Short duration programs only casually related to any specific upgrading purpose or goal

The area of informal education carried on outside of organized channels and without recognizable sponsorship or instruction does not lend itself to uniform measurement. Such education, as useful as it may be to the user, includes selective and general reading, exposure to the communications media, travel, films, discussion groups, attendance at meetings, organizational and committee membership, community and social activities, etc.

APPLICATIONS OF THE CONTINUING UNIT EDUCATION IN NURSING

The American Nurses' Association endorses the concept of continuing education for registered nurses as one means by which nurses can maintain competence and meet standards of practice developed by the profession. In its Guidelines for Certification, prepared by the Congress for Nursing Practice for use by the division interim certification boards, ANA has defined the term "certification" as recognition of excellence in clinical practice. To meet the requirements for certification, the individual practitioner will have to submit data to indicate currency of knowledge, among other criteria. Evidence of continuing education units for courses attended would be one valid source of such data.

Employers of nurses also have special needs for means of measuring educational activities, not only for employment purposes, but for promotion and evaluation of the impact of continuing education on the improvement and changes within the health care system.

The continuing education unit is applicable to the appropriate continuing education learning experience of nurses at all levels from post basic to post doctoral education. The c e u can be utilized to quantify short-term continuing educational courses in coronary care, pediatric nursing, geriatric nursing, as well as other specialized educational programs. The carefully planned scientific sessions offered by voluntary health associations should lend themselves to the continuing education unit.

With the issue of producing some kind of evidence, yet to be determined, of maintaining and updating competence in the practice of nursing directed toward the renewal of licenses, the c e u along with the post-basic, baccalaureate and higher degree credits should alleviate the dilemma of determining the validity of such evidence.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

The Interim Statement on Continuing Education as developed by the Organizing Group for the ANA Council on Continuing Education, and the requirements of administering the continuing education unit as detailed by the National Task Force on the Continuing Education Unit, will provide State Nurses' Associations and State Boards of Nursing with guidelines in adding dimensions to quality continuing education and promoting the use of the continuing education unit. The mechanics concerned with establishing and maintaining quality control over the assignment and

awarding of the continuing education unit are extremely important to nurses and institutions as potential users.

Field testing, which has been in progress for two years, has proven that the continuing education unit is both practical and workable. The administrative requirements set up are both qualitative and quantitative. The concept of the continuing education unit is viable and, although there are precisely defined purposes, objectives, and structures, the concept is flexible.

As viewed by the National University Extension Association, the actions of practitioners are beginning to create the outlines of future forms, structures, and content of both continuing education and higher education itself. Patterns of continuing professional education, in terms of a curriculum for lifelong learning, are emerging through the leadership of adult educators associated with institutions of higher education. Although recognition has been given to continuing education for years, higher adult education is now clearly coming into its own. The acceptance of the continuing education unit is just one example f finally arriving at a suitable means of recognizing and rewarding individual and institutional efforts in the pursuit of continuing education.

MECHANICS AND RECORD KEEPING OF THE C E U AS ADOPTED BY THE NATIONAL TASK FORCE

The key to the success and usefulness of the c e u will be found in its discriminating use. While the c e u is basically a quantifying mechanism, the administrative process with which it is implemented can and should provide the quality control factors to make the c e u a meaningful measurement. Administrative guidelines for the c e u process have been established by the National Task Force and are given below. It is stressed that the system of recording units of continuing education for participants may be related to the current system of permanent records in use at the institution or a separate and parallel system can be designed and maintained. Reference is made again, however, to each of the elements found in the definition of the c e u, i.e., an organized continuing education experience; under responsible leadership; capable direction; and qualified instruction. It is further emphasized that the number of c e u's for each offering should be determined in advance through the regular channels of the administrative unit responsible for the coordination of such non-credit activities and in cooperation with the appropriate departments of the institution or organization.

These mechanics are those that are concerned with establishing and maintaining the quality control over the assignment and awarding of the c e u.

In the statement of the National Task Force on the Continuing Education Unit, the administrative requirements are detailed as follows:

1. A specific high level individual within the continuing education operation of the institution should certify and approve the awarding of ceu's for a program prior to the program offering.

2. The program director for each learning experience should be responsible for certifying that the program was attended and completed by each of the individual participants.

3. The institution is responsible for establishing and maintaining permanent records of continuing education units awarded. It is strongly recommended by the Task Force that the information to be recorded for each individual include the following:

   A. The name of the student

   B. Social security number of student

   C. Title of course

   D. Course description and comparative level

   E. Starting and ending dates of activity

   F. Format of program

   G. Number of continuing education units awarded

   H. Sponsoring institution or agency and location of course

   In addition, it is suggested as highly desirable that the permanent records also include:

   A. Evaluation of each individual's performance

   B. The name of instructor and course director

   C. Personal information about the students: address, date of birth, educational background, employment, etc.

   D. Any cooperating sponsors, companies, associations, agencies institutions, governments, etc.

   E. Course classification, i.e., professional, liberal education vocational technical, job entry, inservice, etc.

It was also added by the Task Force that it would be helpful if all continuing education activities be clearly described in terms of audience, purpose, format, content, duration, teaching staff employed, course or experience pre-requisites, other qualifying requirements and levels of instruction so that intelligent judgment could be made.if the transfer process of the c e u was instituted.

Although it is obvious that the actual mechanical process used for implementing the c e u will vary from institution to institution, it might prove helpful to think in general terms about the process. It would appear that there are three basic steps in the c e u process which will apply no matter what individual variations will be found. They are: The DETERMINATION Step, the ACTUATION Step, and the REPORTING Step.

Within the DETERMINATION Step the institution would:

1. Work out the details of the level and type (or format) of the program. This is to be done by the continuing education staff* in conjunction with the instructor or academic representative and the sponsoring agency or organization.

2. Decide (by the persons assigned that responsibility) if the c e u is appropriate for the particular program in question. It is suggested that the c e u will not be appropriate for each and every program within the institution.

3. Determine the number of c e u's to be awarded, based on the planned educational experience.

At this point the ACTUATION Step begins. The first formalized activity in this step may be the announcement of the c e u availability in the program announcement. The second activity is for the participants to actually enroll in the program. The third activity is when (at the completion of the program) the program director certifies that the individual participants did indeed complete the number of contact hours to justify the awarding of the c e u.

The final step, the REPORTING of the c e u, is when the program director has completed the participants' "transcript" or permanent c e u record.

* Refer to the Interim Statement on Continuing Education for application to nursing.

C e u records can by hand tabulated; however, the mechanics lend themselves to already established computer storage and retrieval systems, as used, for example, in institutions of higher learning. Small institutions and organizations have access to computer-based operations in nearly every community served by an industry or college and university. Arrangements can be made, through contractual agreements, for storage and retrieval.

Ultimately, the costs to the learner who will need transcripts recording c e u's from a number of sources can be reduced through a national data bank.

All institutions and organizations should be encouraged to experiment with the c e u and provide the Organizing Group of the Council on Continuing Education with evidence of benefits as well as problems encountered. The Organizing Group is working as appropriate with the National Task Force on these efforts.